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Lived Experiences of Parents of Children with Physical Disabilities at University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Ilorin

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ABSTRACT

Background: Parents of children with physical disabilities often experience emotional, social, psychological, and financial challenges that may affect their attitudes, coping abilities, and the wellbeing of their children. In Nigeria, limited qualitative studies have explored these experiences within the local context. ***Purpose*:** This study explored the experiences of parents of children with physical disabilities, as well as parents' perceptions and attitudes toward children with physical disabilities at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UITH), Ilorin. ***Methods*:** A qualitative descriptive case study design was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to recruit parents of children with physical disabilities receiving care at UITH. Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. ***Results*:** Three themes emerged: parents' perceptions, parents' attitudes, and factors influencing perceptions and attitudes. Parents initially experienced shock, fear, sadness, and confusion, but gradually developed acceptance, resilience, and hope. Despite experiences of stigma, most parents expressed love, commitment, and optimism toward their children. Religion, cultural beliefs, healthcare support, and social support significantly influenced parental perceptions and coping. ***Conclusion*:** Parents' experiences are shaped by emotional reactions, religious and cultural beliefs, and available support systems. Family-centred care, counselling, and supportive healthcare interventions may enhance parental adjustment and positive caregiving experiences. ***Implications for Nursing*:** The findings highlight the important role of nurses in providing emotional support, counselling, health education, and advocacy for families of children with physical disabilities. Nursing practice should adopt a family-centred approach that addresses the psychosocial and spiritual needs of parents while promoting disability awareness, stigma reduction, and supportive care interventions. The study also emphasizes the need for nursing education, administration, and research initiatives focused on improving the wellbeing of children with disabilities and their families.

Keywords: Physical disabilities, Perception, Attitude, Parent, Children with physical disabilities.

What does this paper add?

1. This study provides insight into the lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of parents caring for children with physical disabilities in a Nigerian tertiary healthcare setting, particularly at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UITH), Ilorin.
2. The study highlights the significant influence of religious beliefs, cultural perceptions, family support, and healthcare counselling on parental acceptance and coping with childhood physical disabilities.
3. The findings contribute to existing qualitative literature by demonstrating how emotional reactions, such as fear, sadness, and confusion, gradually evolve into acceptance, resilience, and hope through institutional and social support.
4. The study further emphasizes the importance of family-centred nursing interventions, counselling services, and disability awareness programs in improving parental adaptation and the well-being of children with physical disabilities.

Introduction

Parents of children with physical disabilities often experience emotional, psychological, and social challenges while caring for their children. Studies have shown that parents frequently report feelings of fear, stress, uncertainty, loneliness, acceptance, commitment, and love in response to their caregiving experiences (Fong & Mohd. Ali, 2023). While some families receive support from relatives and organizations, others experience isolation and inadequate social support. Disability is generally described as a condition that significantly limits an individual's physical, mental, or social functioning compared to what is considered typical (Babik & Gardner, 2021). In many societies, children with physical disabilities continue to experience stigma, discrimination, social exclusion, and misconceptions rooted in cultural and societal beliefs (Alhumaid & Said, 2023).

The experience of raising a child with disability has been explained through the theory of "triadic experience," which involves the interaction between the child, family, and environment. Parents often experience shock, confusion, denial, or emotional distress when they first notice signs of disability in their child (Ahsan & Dimas, 2020). Over time, however, some parents gradually develop acceptance and coping strategies, particularly when they receive adequate information, emotional support, and professional guidance.

Globally, about one billion people live with disabilities, including approximately 244 million children with different forms of disability (UNICEF, 2021). A large proportion of these children reside in developing countries, including Nigeria, where reliable data on childhood disability remains limited due to poor documentation and inadequate health information systems (Onyedikachi, 2023). In sub-Saharan Africa, factors, such as poverty, inadequate healthcare services, limited awareness, stigma, and cultural beliefs, continue to affect the wellbeing and social inclusion of children with disabilities and their families (Saleem, 2020).

Parents' perceptions and attitudes toward children with physical disabilities play a significant role in the child's emotional wellbeing, rehabilitation, and social integration. Evidence from nursing research indicates that many parents experience psychological stress, inadequate awareness, and caregiving difficulties while caring for children with special health needs. Bani-Ahmed et al. (2023) reported that insufficient parental awareness and limited support systems negatively affect caregiving experiences among families. Similarly, Al Shikh et al. (2025) found that parents' attitudes, knowledge, and caregiving practices significantly influence the quality of care provided to children and emphasized the importance of health education and supportive nursing interventions.

Negative parental perceptions may lead to denial, reduced advocacy, social withdrawal, and poor psychosocial outcomes for children with disabilities. Conversely, positive parental attitudes and supportive environments can enhance children's independence, confidence, and quality of life. Despite the growing number of children living with physical disabilities, limited qualitative studies have explored parents' perceptions and attitudes toward these children within the Nigerian context. Therefore, this study seeks to explore parents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences toward children with physical disabilities and identify factors influencing these perceptions and attitudes.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research

design using a case study approach to explore the perceptions and attitudes of parents toward children with physical disabilities at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UITH), Ilorin. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that seek to understand human experiences, emotions, beliefs, and social realities from the participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive case study design enabled the researchers to obtain rich and detailed information regarding the lived experiences of parents caring for children with physical disabilities within their natural setting.

Study Setting

The study was conducted at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UITH), Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. UITH is a major tertiary healthcare institution that provides specialized healthcare services to patients from Kwara State and neighbouring states. The hospital has pediatric and physiotherapy units where children with physical disabilities receive medical care, rehabilitation, and counselling services. The setting was considered appropriate, because it provides access to parents who regularly accompany their children for treatment and follow-up care.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants for the study. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative studies to select participants who possess adequate knowledge and experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Polit & Beck, 2021). Parents whose children had been diagnosed with physical disabilities and who attended UITH during the period of data collection were purposively selected.

The sample size was determined by data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information or themes emerge from subsequent interviews (Guest et al., 2020). A total of participants who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate were interviewed until thematic saturation was achieved.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The use of interviews allowed participants to freely express their feelings, experiences, and perceptions regarding caring for children with physical disabilities. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet and private environment within the hospital to ensure confidentiality and minimize distractions.

An audio recorder and field notes were used during the interviews. The audio recordings ensured accurate capturing of participants' responses, while field notes helped document non-verbal expressions, emotions, and observations during the interview sessions. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted in English or the preferred local language of the participant. Interviews conducted in local languages were later translated into English during transcription.

The Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature was used for data collection. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore:

- Parents' perceptions of children with physical disabilities;
- Parents' attitudes toward their children;
- Emotional and social experiences of caregiving;
- Cultural and religious influences on disability perception; and
- Sources of support available to parents.

The interview guide also included probing questions to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and clarify their responses. The guide was reviewed by experts in qualitative research and child health nursing to ensure content validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection using thematic analysis. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and carefully read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data. The transcripts were coded systematically, and similar codes were grouped into categories and themes.

Thematic analysis was guided by the six-step process described by Braun and Clarke (2021), which includes familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. NVivo, version 15 software, was used to assist in organizing and managing the qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the

Ethical Review Committee of the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and written informed consent was obtained before participation. Participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation throughout the study. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

To maintain confidentiality, participants' names were not recorded; instead, codes, such as "Participant 1" and "Participant 2", were used during transcription and reporting of findings. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers.

Ethical clearance reference number: UITH/CAT/189/VOL.21B/687.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was ensured using the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

- **Credibility** was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and the use of verbatim quotations to accurately represent participants' views.
- **Dependability** was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail of all research activities, including interview procedures, coding processes, and theme development.
- **Confirmability** was enhanced through reflexivity and careful documentation of decisions made during data analysis to minimize researcher bias.
- **Transferability** was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the study setting, participants, and research procedures to enable readers determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study involved parents of children with physical disabilities receiving treatment at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital (UITH), Ilorin. Mothers constituted the majority of participants. Most participants were married and belonged to either nuclear or extended family settings. Their occupations included teaching, trading, civil service, agriculture, and business, while the number of children ranged from two to six. Several participants reported that the child with physical disability was either their first child, fourth child, or only child with a medical condition.

Participants explained that the children's conditions affected family life through disruption of work schedules, repeated hospital visits, financial strain, reduced business activities, and emotional stress. Despite these challenges, many parents expressed hope, optimism, and commitment toward caring for their children.

Data analysis generated three major themes:

1. Parents' perceptions toward children with physical disabilities;
2. Parents' attitudes toward children with physical disabilities; and
3. Factors influencing parental perceptions and attitudes toward physical disabilities.

Theme 1: Parents' Perceptions toward Children with Physical Disabilities

Three subthemes emerged under this theme:

- Emotional reactions to disability diagnosis;
- Disruption of family routine and livelihood;
- Acceptance, adaptation, and hope.

Subtheme 1: Emotional Reactions to Disability Diagnosis

Most participants described feelings of shock, fear, sadness, confusion, and emotional trauma following the diagnosis of their child's disability. Many explained that the experience was unexpected and emotionally difficult.

One participant stated:

"I cried and I am still crying." (Participant 2)

Another participant explained:

"It was a shocking experience, but I believed there is nothing difficult for God." (Participant 4)

These responses indicate that the diagnosis of physical disability was associated with emotional distress and uncertainty among parents.

Subtheme 2: Disruption of Family Routine and Livelihood

Participants reported that caregiving responsibilities significantly disrupted their daily activities, occupations, and family routines. Frequent hospital visits and increased caregiving demands affected work schedules and financial activities.

One participant stated:

"I am supposed to be at work now, but I am here in the hospital." (Participant 1)

Another participant explained:

"It really affected some of my work as a civil servant…" (Participant 9)

These findings suggest that caring for children with physical disabilities created considerable social, occupational, and financial challenges for parents.

Subtheme 3: Acceptance, Adaptation, and Hope

Despite the challenges experienced, many parents gradually developed acceptance, resilience, and optimism regarding their children's conditions. Faith in God, prayer, and hope for improvement were commonly identified as coping mechanisms.

One participant stated:

"I am feeling positive and believe it will change." (Participant 2)

Another participant explained:

"I quickly adapted to managing the condition." (Participant 5)

These findings indicate that many parents eventually developed emotional adjustment and hopeful attitudes toward their children's future.

Theme 2: Parents' Attitudes toward Children with Physical Disabilities

The following subthemes emerged:

- Positive parental attitudes and emotional attachment;
- Experiences of stigma and societal reactions;
- Encouragement and caregiving commitment.

Subtheme 1: Positive Parental Attitudes and Emotional Attachment

Most participants demonstrated love, compassion, commitment, and emotional attachment toward their children despite the caregiving burden.

One participant stated:

"Care for your children and love them." (Participant 3)

Another participant explained:

"He is my child, so I have to be there for him." (Participant 9)

These findings demonstrate strong parental commitment and emotional bonding toward children with physical disabilities.

Subtheme 2: Experiences of Stigma and Societal Reactions

Some participants reported experiences of stigma, abuse, and negative comments from neighbours and family members. However, many explained that such experiences did not affect how they perceived or cared for their children.

One participant stated:

"Those who stigmatize give me sadness…" (Participant 7)

Another participant explained:

"It didn't affect how I see my child." (Participant 1)

These findings suggest that although societal stigma existed, many parents remained supportive and emotionally attached to their children.

Subtheme 3: Encouragement and Caregiving Commitment

Participants emphasized the importance of persistence, optimism, regular hospital attendance, and continuous caregiving.

One participant advised:

"They should be optimistic and do all necessary things like visiting the hospital regularly." (Participant 6)

Another participant stated:

"They should keep their hope alive and keep praying." (Participant 1)

These findings indicate that hope, persistence, and medical support were considered important in managing childhood physical disabilities.

Theme 3: Factors Influencing Parental Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Physical Disabilities

The following subthemes emerged:

- Religious and cultural beliefs;
- Experience and exposure changed perceptions;
- Healthcare support and optimism.

Subtheme 1: Religious and Cultural Beliefs

Religion and spirituality strongly influenced how parents interpreted and coped with their children's disabilities. Most participants relied on prayer, faith in God, and religious teachings for emotional support.

One participant stated:

"I fell back to the Holy Quran… this made me stay strong." (Participant 1)

Another participant explained:

"It is all by God and in God." (Participant 8)

Some participants also reported that community members associated disability with spiritual attacks or supernatural causes.

These findings suggest that religion and spirituality played important roles in parental coping and interpretation of disability.

Subtheme 2: Experience and Exposure Changed Perceptions

Several participants explained that their perceptions about physical disability changed after personal caregiving experience and interaction with healthcare professionals.

One participant stated:

"I realized it is not about the parent, but fate." (Participant 9)

Another participant explained:

"Facing this challenge personally now, I have learnt to embrace them more." (Participant 5)

These findings indicate that personal experience improved empathy, understanding, and acceptance toward children with disabilities.

Subtheme 3: Healthcare Support and Optimism

Participants acknowledged the positive role of healthcare professionals in providing encouragement, medical guidance, and emotional support.

One participant stated:

"Always stick to doctor's prescription and recommendation." (Participant 3)

Another participant explained:

"Even the doctors always encourage me that very soon things will be fine." (Participant 7)

These findings demonstrate that healthcare support contributed significantly to parental optimism, confidence, and emotional adjustment.

Discussion

Parental Perceptions of Children with Physical Disabilities

The findings of this study revealed that parents of children with physical disabilities initially experienced significant emotional distress following the diagnosis of their child's condition. Feelings of shock, fear, sadness, confusion, trauma, and emotional pain were commonly expressed by participants. Many parents explained that the diagnosis was unexpected and difficult to process, particularly because they had no prior experience with childhood disability. These findings suggest that the discovery of a child's physical disability often represents a major emotional crisis for parents and may affect their psychological well-being and family stability.

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Junaidi and Dewantoro (2020), who reported that parents commonly experience emotional struggles before gradually accepting their child's disability as part of God's will. Similarly, Mweshi and Mpofu (2018) found that parents of children with cerebral palsy initially experienced fear, confusion, and self-blame before developing better understanding and acceptance following exposure to medical explanations and caregiving experience. The emotional transition observed among participants in the present study also supports the concept of "parental straddling" described by King et al. (2000), where parents alternate between emotional distress and gradual adaptation while trying to reconcile the child's condition with expectations of normality.

The study further revealed that the presence of a child with physical disability significantly disrupted family routines, occupational responsibilities, and livelihood activities. Frequent hospital visits, caregiving demands, financial strain, and constant supervision altered parents' daily schedules and reduced participation in business and work-related activities. Several participants explained that caregiving responsibilities limited their ability to attend work regularly, manage businesses effectively, or participate in social activities. This finding indicates that physical disability in children extends beyond the affected child and creates substantial socioeconomic and emotional burdens on the family.

The findings also demonstrated that despite the emotional and practical challenges experienced, many parents gradually developed acceptance, resilience, optimism, and hope regarding their children's conditions. Most participants attributed their coping ability to faith in God, prayer, and positive expectations about the future. Parents increasingly viewed their children with affection and emotional attachment rather than as burdens. This finding supports the observations of Bani-Ahmed et al. (2023), who reported that parental understanding, counselling, and support systems contribute significantly to improved caregiving experiences and emotional adjustment among families of children with special health needs. The findings

further suggest that continuous interaction with healthcare professionals at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital may have contributed to the positive adjustment and growing acceptance demonstrated by many participants.

However, the findings of this study differ from earlier studies that reported persistent negative perceptions and prolonged feelings of guilt among parents of children with disabilities. For instance, Omozusi and Obebe (2024) reported that many Nigerian parents continued to exhibit unfavourable perceptions toward children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In contrast, most participants in the present study demonstrated emotional adaptation, resilience, and acceptance over time. The difference may be associated with the supportive healthcare environment, regular counselling, and continuous exposure to professional medical care available at the study setting.

Parental Attitudes Toward Children with Physical Disabilities

The findings revealed that most parents demonstrated positive attitudes toward their children despite the emotional, financial, and social challenges associated with caregiving. Participants expressed strong affection, compassion, commitment, and emotional attachment toward their children. Many parents emphasized the importance of accepting the child's condition, showing love, and remaining supportive throughout the caregiving process. These findings indicate that parental attitudes were generally characterized by care, resilience, and responsibility rather than rejection or abandonment.

This finding corresponds with the report of Nelson and Srivastava (2023), who found that parents who demonstrate acceptance and supportive attitudes toward children with disabilities are more likely to promote healthy emotional and behavioural outcomes in such children. The findings also suggest that emotional attachment and parental commitment remained strong despite the caregiving burden experienced by many participants.

The study additionally revealed that although some parents encountered stigma, abuse, and negative societal reactions from neighbours, relatives, or community members, these experiences did not substantially alter their affection or commitment toward their children. Some participants reported feelings of sadness resulting from stigmatization; however, encouragement from family members and healthcare providers helped them maintain emotional strength and positive attitudes. This finding is consistent with Kaytez et al. (2025), who observed that negative societal attitudes and stigma may reduce parental self-esteem and contribute to emotional distress among parents of children with disabilities.

Furthermore, the findings showed that hope, optimism, persistence, and faith played important roles in sustaining positive parental attitudes. Parents repeatedly emphasized the need for regular hospital attendance, adherence to medical advice, prayer, and perseverance. These findings agree with the study by Hadjicharalambous (2021), which concluded that faith and social support significantly improve coping ability and emotional resilience among families raising children with physical disabilities. Similarly, Al Shikh et al. (2025) reported that parental attitudes, knowledge, and caregiving practices significantly influence the quality of care provided to children with special needs. The authors further emphasized the importance of supportive healthcare interventions and health education in strengthening positive caregiving behaviours. This supports the present finding that counselling, encouragement, and professional support from healthcare providers contributed positively to parental attitudes and emotional adjustment.

Factors Influencing Parental Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Physical Disabilities

The findings of this study identified religion and spirituality, personal experience and exposure, and healthcare support as major factors influencing parental perceptions and attitudes toward children with physical disabilities. These factors appeared to shape how parents interpreted the disability, coped emotionally, and related with their children.

Religion emerged as one of the strongest influences on parental perception and coping. Most participants viewed the child's disability as an act of God, a divine test, or part of destiny. Prayer, Islamic teachings, and trust in God were repeatedly mentioned as important coping mechanisms that helped parents sustain hope and emotional stability. Some participants also reported that members of the community attributed disability to spiritual attacks or supernatural causes. These findings are consistent with Mweshi and Mpofu (2018), who found that religious beliefs help parents interpret

disability in ways that reduce stigma and promote emotional adaptation. The findings also support Rosenberg et al. (2012), who emphasized that parental emotional adjustment and responses to disability are strongly influenced by social beliefs, environmental context, and family support systems.

The study further revealed that personal experience and exposure significantly changed parents' perceptions about childhood disability. Several participants explained that before having a child with disability, they believed such conditions resulted from parental negligence or poor caregiving. However, after personally experiencing the challenges associated with caregiving and interacting with healthcare providers, their perceptions became more empathetic and understanding. This finding suggests that direct experience may reduce blame, increase compassion, and improve acceptance toward children with disabilities and their families.

Healthcare support and professional encouragement also emerged as important factors influencing parental optimism and emotional adjustment. Participants acknowledged the role of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals in providing reassurance, medical guidance, and emotional support. Continuous counselling and regular interaction with healthcare workers appeared to strengthen parents' confidence and hope regarding their children's conditions. This finding agrees with Hadjicharalambous (2021), who reported that access to social and healthcare support improves emotional well-being and resilience among parents of children with disabilities. Similarly, Bani-Ahmed et al. (2023) emphasized that supportive healthcare systems and parental education programs are essential for improving caregiving experiences and reducing psychological stress among families of children with special health needs.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that although parents initially experienced emotional distress and significant caregiving challenges, many gradually developed positive perceptions, resilience, and hopeful attitudes toward their children. The supportive role of religion, personal experience, family encouragement, and healthcare professionals contributed substantially to parental adaptation and emotional adjustment.

Limitations of the Study

This study explored the perceptions and attitudes of parents toward children with physical disabilities using a qualitative approach. As such, the intention of the study was not statistical generalization, but rather an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences within their specific context.

The findings may therefore have limited transferability to other settings or populations, because participants were selected from a single tertiary healthcare institution in Ilorin. In addition, participants' responses were based on personal experiences and self-reports, which may have been influenced by emotions, religious beliefs, or social desirability.

Time and logistical constraints also limited prolonged follow-up interviews that could have provided broader perspectives. Nevertheless, detailed descriptions of the study setting, participants, and research procedures were provided to enhance the transferability of the findings to similar contexts.

Conclusion

The study concluded that parents' perceptions and attitudes toward children with physical disabilities in UITH, Ilorin, are influenced by a blend of emotional, religious, cultural, and experiential factors. While initial reactions were characterized by fear, pain, and confusion, most parents eventually developed positive attitudes marked by love, faith, and resilience. Religion, hospital support, and exposure to other families facing similar challenges were key factors that promoted acceptance and understanding.

This finding demonstrates that when parents receive adequate emotional, social, and institutional support, they are better able to nurture and advocate for their children with disabilities. It also suggests that increased education and awareness can reduce stigma and improve societal attitudes toward disability.

Implications for Nursing

Nursing Practice

The study's findings underscore the crucial role nurses play in supporting parents of children with physical disabilities. This study implies that nursing practice should adopt a family-centered approach where emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs are addressed alongside the child's physical health. Nurses should also guide parents to available community resources and support services. It is essential to empower parents on disabilities management and promote acceptance rather than stigma.

Nursing Education

The findings of this study have a concern on nursing education. It highlights the need for nursing students to be adequately exposed to the psychosocial aspects of care for families raising children with physical disabilities. Nursing education should go beyond clinical skills to include courses and practical sessions on empathy, cultural sensitivity, counselling, and communication with families facing emotional distress. This can be achieved by integrating disability-focused modules into the nursing curriculum.

Nursing Administration

In nursing administration, the study implies a need for policies and programs that prioritize the inclusion and welfare of families raising children with disabilities. This study also calls for administrative support for community outreach programs that promote disability awareness and parental empowerment.

Nursing Research

The study opens new directions for nursing research. Since parental attitudes and perceptions significantly influence child care outcomes, further qualitative studies are needed to explore different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic perspectives on disability and how nursing interventions can enhance adaptation and acceptance.

Impact Statement

This study highlights the critical influence of parental perceptions and attitudes on the care, acceptance, and rehabilitation outcomes of children with physical disabilities. By revealing the roles of cultural, religious, and social factors, the findings provide evidence to guide nursing practice, policy development, and family-centred interventions. It underscores the need for targeted counselling, stigma reduction strategies, and improved support systems within healthcare settings to enhance the quality of life of affected children and their families.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript.

Author Contributions

Study Design: **MY, FMA**. Data Collection: **BMF, FMA, AOF, BSO**. Data Analysis: **BMF, BSO, MY**. Study Supervision: **MY, BMF**. Manuscript Writing: **BMF, AOF, BSO**. Critical Revision for Important Intellectual Content: **BMF, MY, AOF**.

Table 1. Themes, subthemes and illustrative focus

Themes	Subthemes	Description/Illustrative Focus
Parents' Perceptions Toward Children with Physical Disabilities	Emotional reactions to disability diagnosis	Parents expressed feelings of shock, fear, sadness, trauma, confusion, and emotional distress upon discovering their child's physical disability.
	Disruption of family routine and livelihood	Participants reported that caregiving responsibilities altered their daily routines, work schedules, businesses, finances, and family activities due to frequent hospital visits and increased caregiving demands.
	Acceptance, adaptation, and hope	Despite initial emotional distress, many parents gradually developed acceptance, resilience, optimism, and hope, often relying on faith and medical care for strength and encouragement.
Parents' Attitudes Toward Children with Physical Disabilities	Positive parental attitudes and emotional attachment	Most participants demonstrated love, compassion, care, commitment, and strong emotional attachment toward their children despite the caregiving burden.
	Experiences of stigma and societal reactions	Some parents experienced stigma, negative comments, emotional abuse, and discouraging attitudes from neighbours, relatives, and community members,

		although many remained supportive of their children.
	Encouragement and caregiving commitment	Participants emphasized persistence, regular hospital attendance, prayer, optimism, and continuous caregiving as important coping and support strategies for parents of children with disabilities.
Factors Influencing Parental Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Physical Disabilities	Religious and cultural beliefs	Religious faith, particularly Islamic beliefs, strongly influenced how parents interpreted and coped with their children's disabilities, while some community members attributed disabilities to spiritual causes.
	Experience and exposure changed perception	Personal caregiving experiences and exposure to similar cases changed many parents' previous perceptions about disability and increased empathy and understanding.
	Healthcare support and optimism	Encouragement from healthcare professionals, adherence to medical advice, and regular hospital visits contributed to parental optimism, emotional adjustment, and positive perceptions regarding their children's conditions.

Table 1 presents the themes and subthemes that emerged from the qualitative analysis of parents' experiences and perspectives regarding children with physical disabilities. Three major themes were identified: (1) Parents' Perceptions Toward Children with Physical Disabilities, (2) Parents' Attitudes Toward Children with Physical Disabilities, and (3) Factors Influencing Parental Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Physical Disabilities. The themes comprised several interconnected subthemes reflecting parents' emotional reactions to disability diagnosis, disruptions in family routines and livelihood, acceptance and hope, emotional attachment and caregiving commitment, experiences of stigma and societal reactions, as well as the influence of religion, personal experience, and healthcare support on parental perceptions and coping strategies

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